



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
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### **Governor Dalrymple Proclaims *Birth Defects Prevention Month* in North Dakota**

Bismarck, N.D. – Governor Jack Dalrymple has proclaimed January 2014 as *Birth Defects Prevention Month* in North Dakota. In recognition, the North Dakota Department of Health continues to raise awareness about the frequency with which birth defects occur in the United States and the steps that can be taken to prevent them. The risk for many types of birth defects can be reduced through healthy lifestyle choices and medical care before and during pregnancy. In fact, every 4 ½ minutes, a baby is born with a birth defect in the United States.

There are many different kinds of birth defects including congenital heart defects; cleft lip or palate; defects of the brain and spine, bones, muscles and internal organs; and a variety of genetic syndromes. Some have only a minor and brief effect on a baby's health while others have life-threatening or life-long effects, which can often be lessened by early detection and treatment.

More than 120,000 babies born with a birth defect (approximately one in every 33 live births) are reported each year in the United States with around one in every 41 live births occurring in North Dakota. Birth defects are the most common cause of death in infants and the second most common cause of death in children age one to four. Public awareness, expert medical care, accurate and early diagnosis, and social support systems are all essential for optimal prevention and treatment of these all-too-common and often deadly conditions.

“Most people are unaware of how common, costly and critical birth defects are in the United States, or that there are simple steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of birth defects,” said Devaiah Muccatira with the North Dakota Department of Health. “The health of both parents prior to pregnancy can affect the risk of having a child with a birth defect. Food intake, lifestyle choices, factors in the environment, health conditions and medications before and during pregnancy all can play a role in reducing or increasing the risk of birth defects.”

Studies have demonstrated several important steps women can take to help prevent birth defects. Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant are advised to:

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- Consume 400 micrograms of folic acid daily.
- Manage chronic maternal illnesses such as diabetes, seizure disorders, or phenylketonuria (PKU).
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Talk to a health-care provider about taking any medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Do not use alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs.
- See a health-care provider regularly.
- Avoid toxic substances at work or at home.
- Ensure protection against domestic violence.
- Know their family history and seek reproductive genetic counseling, if appropriate.

“Small steps like visiting a health-care provider before pregnancy and taking a multivitamin every day can go a long way,” said Muccatira. “The North Dakota Department of Health encourages prevention and awareness of birth defects among women of childbearing age in North Dakota.”

Children’s Special Health Services is a division within the North Dakota Department of Health that offers services for many children with birth defects. For more information about services available and about *Birth Defects Prevention Month*, contact Devaiah Muccatira, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.4963 or [dmuccatira@nd.gov](mailto:dmuccatira@nd.gov).

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PROCLAMATION  
**BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH**  
JANUARY 2014

**WHEREAS**, birth defects can occur in any family, regardless of the parents' age, gender, race, health history, economic status or education; and

**WHEREAS**, every four and one-half minutes a baby is born in the United States with a birth defect. Birth defects cause one in every five infant deaths and lead to \$2.6 billion per year in hospital costs alone in the United States. In North Dakota, birth defects account for about one in every six infant deaths every year; and

**WHEREAS**, about half of all pregnancies are unplanned, contributing to late entry into prenatal care and presenting a barrier to optimal pregnancy management, particularly during the crucial early weeks of embryonic development; and

**WHEREAS**, two out of three women take prescription medications during pregnancy, many to treat chronic conditions that may impact pregnancy; and

**WHEREAS**, early identification of a child with a birth defect and early intervention services typically improve the child's quality of life and may even save his or her life; and

**WHEREAS**, women are encouraged to take preventive actions such as taking a multivitamin with folic acid during pregnancy to prevent serious defects, maintaining a healthy weight, having regular checkups, avoiding alcohol and tobacco use during pregnancy, learning about family history and genetic risks, and managing maternal medical conditions while minimizing unnecessary medication exposure during pregnancy.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, as Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim January 2014, **BIRTH DEFECTS PREVENTION MONTH** in the state of North Dakota.